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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TW](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TAIWAN SCHOLAR: MA'S SOFTER TONE ON WHO/WHA

REFLECTS TRUST-BUILDING, NOT PESSIMISM

REF: TAIPEI 1717

Classified By: The Deputy Director for reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary. China is blocking academic travel to Taiwan as PRC leaders hammer out a consensus on ties with the island, according to a well-connected scholar in confirmation of previous similar reports. On "international space," President Ma's apparent pessimism about prospects for a breakthrough at next May's WHA meeting may be based, in part, by a desire to lower public expectations, but also on the President's effort to engage China in a way that builds trust and is sustainable in the long run. End Summary.

Academic Visits Drop as China Reviews Taiwan Approach

¶2. (C) PRC officials are preventing Chinese academics from traveling to Taiwan to discuss Taiwan's international space and other sensitive issues, according to University of Politics and Law Institute of International Relations Research Fellow Liu Fu-kuo. Liu, who also serves as Executive Director of CSCAP Taiwan, told AIT Pol chief during a December 18 that three academics slated to participate in a December 3 seminar in Taipei sponsored by the Brookings Institution cancelled just days before the meeting. Liu noted that there had been several other, similar cancellations (ref A), which he said were unquestionably part of a coordinated PRC effort to limit discussions of Taiwan's "international space" and other sensitive issues. Beijing wanted to avoid sending mixed messages as senior officials worked to reach agreement on how to approach these topics. For now, Liu emphasized, Taiwan scholars continued to travel freely to the mainland.

WHO: Lowering Expectations and Building Trust

¶3. (C) Pol chief noted that in a December 9 Washington Post interview, President Ma lower his appeared to set a less ambitious goal for the May 2009 meeting of the World Health Assembly. In the interview, Ma said Taiwan & just wanted to attend the (WHA) meeting. We're not asking for anything more. This seemed a step back from Ma's May statement that his goal was to secure & WHO observer status under an appropriate name and the August 5 statement by Presidential Spokesman Wang Yu-chi that, while it would be relatively hard to secure WHO membership because WHO membership was based on statehood, Taiwan hoped to & enter the WHA in May.

¶4. (C) Liu said he was not surprised at Ma's change of tone. The gap between the President's economic campaign pledges and results since he had taken office had given him a lesson in the dangers of over-promising, Liu suggested and Ma comments on the WHO/WHA might be intended to lower public expectations for next May's meeting. However, the change in tone

probably also was evidence the President was learning how to deal with the PRC. In previous dealings with Beijing, Ma had publicly announced goals and then waited for China to meet it. While this was effective in securing short-term "victories" on relatively non-controversial matters, it damaged the mutual trust needed to solve the more difficult issues the two sides face. Liu cited the example of Ma,s announcement that cross-Strait tourist visits would begin July 4, 2008. PRC officials were &furious,8 Liu said, not because they opposed the opening, but because Ma had announced the date without consulting them. China did not object in principle to the opening, Liu said, but had not worked out the practical steps needed to meet Ma,s target date. As a result, unwilling to make it seem that China was dragging its feet, they had to scramble to line up a carrier and &tourists8 in time to meet the deadline. On the more sensitive topic of Taiwan's participation in the WHO or WHA, a less specific stated goal might actually make it easier for Ma to reach a satisfactory result, Liu suggested.

SYOUNG